

A PPT prepared by Luis Salazar

FOUR RULES FOR CLEAR SENTENCES

RULE 1: USE STRONG VERBS.

- ✖ Stay away from “there is/are” sentences
 - + They hide the meaning you could express with a more precise verb. For instance:
 - ✖ WEAK: There was a cold wind blowing from the north.
 - ✖ STRONG: A cold wind blew from the north.
 - + They also make sentences wordy. For example:
 - ✖ WORDY: There is no doubt that drugs are a main factor in the rising crime rate.
 - ✖ BETTER: Undoubtedly, drugs contribute to the rising crime rate.

✖ Avoid “It is” sentences

+ They are dull and cause wordiness. Examples:

- ✖ WORDY: It is a constant battle between people for gun control and people against control.
- ✖ BETTER: Advocates for gun control endlessly battle those who oppose it.
- ✖ WORDY: It's up to the parents of the child to hire a counselor for him.
- ✖ BETTER: The child's parents should hire a counselor for him.

✖ Avoid passive voice sentences

+ They are less action oriented and postpone or leave out information about agents. For example:

✖ Passive: The new drug is being tested by a French pharmaceutical company.

✖ Active: A French pharmaceutical company is testing the new drug.

+ However, in some cases it helps to avoid cacophony or to obscure the subject when it is diplomatic to do so. Example:

✖ Secret discussions must be recorded, and the records could be released after the deal is completed or fails.

✖ Make sure subject and verb match

+ Examples:

- ✖ CONFUSING: Succeeding in math contains several key factors.
- ✖ BETTER: Succeeding in math involves several key factors.
- ✖ CONFUSING: Reckless drivers make any road hazardous, but a heavily travelled road already obtains that potential.
- ✖ BETTER: Reckless drivers make any road hazardous, but a heavily travelled road already holds that potential.

RULE 2: AVOID WORDINESS.

- ✖ Good writing expresses an idea in as few words as possible.
- ✖ Be willing to reexamine your writing to get rid of unnecessary words that clog up your sentences. For example:
 - + WORDY: Skepticism is an attitude that is very healthy for a student to possess.
 - + BETTER: Skepticism is a healthy attitude.

-
- ✖ After you finish your first draft, be ready to reevaluate each sentence for wordiness.
 - ✖ Common Wordy expressions:
 - + Due to the fact that -> Because
 - + At this point in time-> Now
 - + In the event that-> If
 - + Until such time as-> Until
 - + Despite the fact that-> Although
 - + At all times-> Always
 - + In connection with-> About
 - + In view of the fact that-> Since
 - + In the instance of-> In

✖ Avoid redundant words

- + These are words and phrases that are just restating information you already mentioned. For example:
 - ✖ A reader reads a literary essay after reading a short story so he can get an understanding of what he read.
- + If you express an idea clearly, you should not need to restate it.

✖ Avoid passive voice

- + They make your ideas longer. For example:

- ✖ WORDY: These walls will have to be removed by the contractor in order to make improvements in the actual design.

- ✖ BETTER: The contractor will have to remove these walls to improve the design.

- + Arrange your sentences in active voice to avoid unnecessary words choking up your text. (As much as possible).

RULE 3: VARY SENTENCE LENGTH.

- ✖ Keep a balance between simple, compound and complex sentences.
 - + Simple: Golf is definitely the most difficult sport I've ever played.
 - + Compound: I enjoy the challenge of all sports, but I especially enjoy the one that is most difficult to master.
 - + Complex: When I first watched golf on TV, I thought that hitting that little white ball would be easy.

✖ Avoid a lot of short sentences

+ It is monotonous, often called “choppiness”.

✖ Mary is 25 years old. She is a French major. She lives in Edinburgh. (All of this could be said in one complex sentence).

✖ Avoid overusing long sentences

+ This prevents your readers from taking pauses they need.

✖ His tie was green and covered with colorful cartoon characters and spread about four inches wide at the bottom and was clipped about halfway down between the not and the end, which hung about two inches below his western style belt, and he claimed that he made the tie clip himself from a hood ornament and no one knew cars like he did.

RULE 4: ADHERE TO RULES FOR GRAMMAR, SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION

- ✖ If you do not comply with this, careful readers will stop to reexamine and mentally correct your mistakes; likewise, this will diminish your credibility as a writer.
- ✖ Besides, usage errors or a misplaced or missing comma can completely alter the meaning of your sentences.

✖ Usage errors

+ Advice, advise

+ Loose, lose

+ Your, you're

+ It's, its

+ Well, good

+ Lie, lay

+ Raise, rise

+ Then, than

+ Affect, effect

+ Their, there, they're

+ Whose, who's

+ To, two, too

+ Which, that

+ Principal, principle

+ Sit, set

✖ Write complete sentences

- + Your sentences must have a subject and a verb expressing a complete thought.
- + Fragments are incomplete sentences, and you can correct them by:
 - ✖ adding a missing subject or verb so that the sentence can stand by itself
 - ✖ if it is a dependent clause, attach it to the sentences that precedes it
- ✖ Check the spelling of words when unsure.

RULES FOR CLEAR SENTENCES

- ✖ 1. Use strong verbs
 - + Avoid “there is/are” sentences
 - + Avoid “it is” sentences
 - + Avoid passive voice sentences
 - + Match subjects and verbs
- ✖ 2. Avoid wordiness
 - + Avoid redundant words
 - + Avoid passive voice
- ✖ 3. Vary sentence length
- ✖ 4. Adhere to rules for grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - + Make sure sentences are complete